



COMMUNITY IN EDUCATION: BRINGING BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER

Schools and local businesses have common and often compatible goals to better prepare their students for college, careers and life. The key is finding how they should work together. Over the past 20 years, education and businesses have connected and talks have progressed to the “how” and “what” these relationships could do together to reach their mutual goals. Through a set of meetings, the Learning First Alliance (LFA) and its business partners have focused on building a firmer base. We have found that businesses, schools, their owners and employees can successfully work together when they understand that they, too, are as unique as our students. The key is finding how each business and school can make an impact.

This requires a shift in the fundamental relationship between schools, businesses, and the communities they serve. The education community knows what the elements are in successful schools; and knows that a part of success is how each school engages with their community, especially their business community, which can range from large, multi-national companies to small, family-managed storefronts.

LFA, a coalition of 12 national education organizations, most recently convened its members and representatives from business entities to work together to find practices that could build better relations between local school officials and businesses and community organizations. We asked, “Can we develop a menu of ideas from which individuals, companies, and schools can find better ways to help all students become ready for their next steps?”

This gathering was structured around the six elements of success defined by LFA in its recent compendium, “The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work.” These include: Focus

on the Total Child; Commitment to Equity and Access; Family and Community Engagement; Distributed Leadership; Strong, Supported Teaching Force and Staff; and Relationship-Oriented School Climate.

The 30 participants included executives and key staff from LFA’s member organizations and high-level representatives from technology, manufacturing, media, local government agencies and nonprofits. All have a strong commitment to education and helping schools teach skills that will help students thrive in the future economy.

There are many ways to improve school and business/community connections, both formal and informal, participants said. They discussed ideas and made recommendations, then voted on the most helpful based on the following elements:

- **Supporting the Total Child**
- **Developing a Strong and Supported Teaching Force and Staff**
- **Engaging Families and Communities**
- **Focusing on All Students**

Participants called for more sustainable models to allow businesses and other organizations to come together and bring specific plans to help students gain proficiencies in the skills needed.

The discussions brought forth a menu of ideas under four of the six Elements of Success. Each of these should be viewed in the context of individual businesses and communities, but offer recommendations that should be considered by all schools and civic-minded businesses and organizations.



1 SUPPORTING THE TOTAL CHILD, INCLUDING ACADEMICS, MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

A focus on the total child considers both factors inside the classroom (such as instruction) and outside of it (such as family engagement and a child's readiness to learn). This can also include the development of highly desired soft skills such as the abilities to communicate, set goals, and resolve conflicts.

Schools are paying more attention to a child's ability to learn—not just academic achievement but their mental and physical well being. Successful schools provide their students with an exposure to how they can manage themselves, including the roles of exercise, nutrition, and other tools to help them become effective learners.

Working together is done at many levels, strategic and instructional. One district, for instance, joined with its business community to redevelop its definition of a successful school, looking less at test scores and more at data such as attendance. This is because schools that are only looking at reading and mathematics are not achieving the desired goal.

Several participants recommended that to make this change, business and other community leaders need to be brought into the discussion so that they all agree on the goals, and how they are measured.

What can business and education representatives do together to advance the concept of total child?

- Working with schools, the local business community can offer mentoring opportunities for students to explore their interests and passions and give them exposure to the world of work;
- The local business community could form a formal alliance with education (preK-12) communities that focuses on the development of soft skills needed for work, and build a specific plan or specific proficiencies for each grade level;
- Businesses and educators could join together to advocate for state economic development investment to improve and enhance school counselor ratios and professional development to identify and teach hard and soft skills;
- School districts could collaborate with local businesses and local business associations to redefine “high-performing schools,” based on criteria such as volunteerism, extracurricular participation, employment rates, attendance and other soft skills;
- Schools could offer a reciprocal process where business and educators find ways to work with students to enhance the learning of key business-related ideas in both the school and the business settings.

2 TEACHERS AND STAFF: A QUALITY EDUCATION REQUIRES QUALITY EDUCATORS

Successful schools thrive, in large part, because they are staffed with outstanding, caring educators, including teachers, principals, school counselors and others, who are well educated, well prepared and well supported. Educators in these schools benefit from continuous learning and support along the professional continuum.

But the field faces challenges with recruitment and retention. Enrollments in teacher preparation programs have significantly declined in recent years, but an overshadowing problem is retention. Working conditions, leadership climate, and factors like student debt are causing the teaching profession to lose new and veteran teachers at distressing rates. Educators have long sounded the alarm for better pay and professional working conditions.

Educators and businesses also agree that teachers

need to be well prepared before entering a classroom and given continuous support throughout their careers. Once oriented, the system should have high standards and fair evaluations to build a career path with continuous improvement of skills and practices. There are people who are passionate about teaching—but we must give them the necessary supports to be successful, participants agreed.

What are some ways communities and businesses can help support teachers?

- Communities should build opportunities for reciprocal job shadowing and internships between businesses and educators—perhaps over a school or summer vacation—that would help each population better understand the others' needs and challenges and ways they could make a positive impact;

- National organizations should work to build an awareness campaign, similar to Johnson & Johnson's campaign to promote nursing, to promote the rewards of the teaching profession and recruit new teaching candidates (as many people do not understand what it means to be a teacher);

- Schools should build partnerships with local businesses around specific projects to help fuel students' and teachers' passions and increase their knowledge through a real-life, hands-on experience;

- Communities can facilitate partnerships where local businesses adopt a school or class to help students and staff get resources that they need;

- Local community and business organizations

could host educator recognition awards to highlight deserving principals, teachers and support staff. The contest could include community nominations and voting, followed by an awards celebration;

- Schools could first assess their skills gap, then seek out partnerships with local businesses. This would encourage them to look for opportunities for businesses and educators to come together, perhaps even allowing teachers who want to experience the business culture to take on short-term, freelance projects that could help them better hone their skills and see what businesses need while educating business representatives about K-12 educators' needs.

3 ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN MEANINGFUL ROLES

In addition to being filled with knowledgeable, capable and caring educators, successful schools engage families and communities in support of students. This work is backed by a solid body of research showing that involving families and community members in important roles improves student learning and development, as well as strengthens the capacity of teachers and schools.

In one example, Discovery Education has strategies to show the community digital products that have replaced textbooks in the schools it serves, and it helps school officials communicate to their communities how the service will impact parents and students learning.

How can schools and businesses better work together to meet the needs of families and communities?

- In each community, identify the top unfilled jobs and high-growth career opportunities and build

awareness and community conversations with families, business representatives, higher education representatives and other community members;

- Schools should facilitate career and career environment exposure through the school system;

- Schools could develop partnerships with local businesses to provide needed health services, such as immunizations, screenings and clinic supplies;

- Schools could establish business partnerships to engage parents and PTAs by sponsoring events to showcase products and ongoing partnerships, both formal and informal;

- Employers should allow opportunities for their employees—parents and nonparents—to participate in advocacy for their schools;

- Employers should find opportunities to provide digital capacity to either a school or community location for students who do not have access to internet or devices.

4 FOCUSING ON ALL STUDENTS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION

Successful schools ensure all students have access to high-quality services and supports enabling them to set and reach high goals for learning. In these schools, equity isn't measured solely by inputs; some students need additional resources to have the same opportunity for success as others. They ensure the needs of all students are met, including English-language learners, students with disabilities, children of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ students and others. These successful schools recognize that student diversity is an asset.

Participants agreed that schools and businesses need to incorporate an understanding of how different cultures impact communities, schools, and learning. With this understanding schools will be able to expand

and build on the aspirations of their students and build the different pathways to graduation and success beyond school.

How can educators and the business community support one another to ensure all students have access to high-quality academics and opportunities to learn through experiences?

- The business community can help rally a commitment to ensure every student participates in a relevant capstone experience to explore career interests and develop their passions. Public, private and nonprofit sectors can help ensure access and support whether this would be attained through an internship, credential or service-learning project;

- School systems should be designed to engage more with policymakers to influence policy and practice, create authentic learning environments that mirror students' experiences outside the classroom, ensure the curriculum emphasizes the skills the business community needs, use project-based and competency-based learning, and be more culturally responsive to the children and families they represent;
- Communities should commit to providing universal pre-K services for all children;

- Communities could build a school/community business roundtable to discuss the educational experience;
- Schools and districts could invite businesses to provide resources and expertise to re-engineer the educational experience;
- Local business and education communities could jointly develop a framework that identifies relevant industry certifications and/or career-ready skills that serve as a roadmap for every student.

WORKSOURCE MONTGOMERY SHOWS STUDENTS REAL-LIFE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Finding employment for high school students and adults is not difficult in Montgomery County, Md., a suburb of Washington. To ensure local high school students have meaningful work, WorkSource Montgomery, an employment resource center, has built on-the-job experiences to bring classroom learning into a new light.

Kristin Tribble, the center's director of community engagement, discussed the organizations' role and philosophies with participants in the LFA business roundtable. WorkSource Montgomery runs federal job centers, a young adult job center, as well as other local employment programs. One of its most unique programs is Summer Rise, which works with local businesses, organizations and government agencies to offer three-week job experiences for up to 475 high school students to give exposure to a wide range of careers.

While students sample a work environment, the program allows employers to interact and glean information about their experiences and skills.

WorkSource Montgomery is unique because, after some deliberation, the group realized that its priority should be businesses, not workers, Tribble said, adding, "If we don't understand the needs of the businesses, we can't provide workers with the appropriate skills."

Working with local employers, the group identified four areas where the county would see significant growth and need employees with specific skill sets: hospitality, health care, construction and IT/cybersecurity.

But the group is cognizant of workers' needs: Many may have children, for instance, and Tribble noted that one challenge is persuading first-generation immigrant students to take low-paid or unpaid internships that can help them build skills for careers over immediate, low-skilled jobs, which are abundant in the area.

For more information, go to <https://worksourcemontgomery.com/>.



MOVING FORWARD

This meeting made it clear that the business and education communities want to learn from one another and build an in-depth, reciprocal relationship. This has several implications.

We must continue to forge new bonds where schools and employers understand each other's needs and understand the benefits for students to experience the modern work environment.

However, there are much more substantial conversations needed at the community level. Accountability, for example, has a profound impact on how well students will be ready for work when they graduate. We realize that, beyond academics, students must be prepared to work in groups, solve problems, communicate and adapt to the ever-changing world. These ideas need to be included as part of a broader accountability plan.

We also found barriers to expanding the working relationship between each sector. These barriers need to be identified at the local level and solutions found

to ensure that students are protected from harm, and well-meaning businesses aren't saddled with unexpected expenses or requirements.

An additional area of need is advocacy. Educators and businesses need to present to the public clear messages around priorities, needs and emerging issues. One such area is the need to elevate the teaching profession and give ongoing support to school professionals. Another is to support the expansion of early childhood programs.

We know that better school and business collaborations can have a profound impact of reaching our mutual goals. This meeting produced a set of ideas that can make that impact a reality.

We ask that you take these ideas and share them with your colleagues in presentations, articles, social media communications and share your success stories with the media, policy makers, and community leaders.

These ideas will make a difference for our students and can transform their learning.

HAAS TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTER NETWORK

The Haas Technical Education Center (HTEC) Network is an industry and education led initiative that enables manufacturing technology educators and their schools to acquire the latest CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machine tools and related CNC ancillary equipment, software and educational materials. CNC is the automation of machine tools by means of computers executing pre-programmed sequences of machine control commands.

The goals are to provide students with a relevant, high-tech and hands-on educational experience, and to graduate work-ready CNC machinists, programmers & engineers for today's industrial employers and the manufacturing challenges of the future.

HTEC Members can contact, collaborate, share and network with more than 1,800 schools, colleges and universities that use Haas CNC machines throughout the Americas. They can also work with over 95 CNC Technology Partners, who have pledged to support CNC Education.

To learn more about HTEC, go to <http://www.htecnetwork.org/>.



REFLECTIONS FROM ATTENDEES OF LFA BUSINESS SUMMIT

Why, in your view, is it so important for schools and community business partners to collaborate?

“Business leaders are united in their concerns regarding their future workforce. Business & industry face a looming gap between available positions and workers with the skills to fill those positions. Partnerships between businesses and education are an important factor in building a strong workforce.”

–**Nancy Fishman, ReadyNation**

“Schools aim to prepare students to be successful in life after graduation. To do so, they need ongoing feedback from community business partners, as to the skills, competencies, and experiences most critical in the industry talent pipeline, as well as timely information about viable current and emerging career pathways.”

–**Rudy Ruiz, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education**

“There are at least two major reasons this collaboration is important. First, public schools are responsible for preparing students for college and careers. Whatever path young people follow, they will become part of the workforce, so preparing them for this inevitable phase of their life requires good communication

with employers. The second reason is equally important, I think. Businesses pay a substantial portion of local taxes and are a key stakeholder in the work of public schools. They need to be actively engaged, and listened to, as school leaders develop policies and implement programs.”

–**Tom Gentzel, National School Boards Association**

“Yes, the adage—it takes a village applies not only to the neighbors ensuring that all kids are safe and supported – it also applies to everyone who benefits from (or would benefit from) the privileges that come with being a part of a community. It is more about shared accountability and support between the organizations. Schools are organizations, and in some communities, are the largest employers, thus it is imperative for schools to understand the business of business. On the other account, businesses are responsible for their survival (not just a bottom line) for the survival of the business taking care of the community where they sit is beneficial to their long-term survival, and schools are a major factor in the direction of the future communities.”

–**Bernadine Futrell, AASA, the School Superintendents Association**

“The ecosystem of schools, communities and business is one of interdependence. Employers are always looking for the best talent and they cannot attract the best talent unless they are in vibrant communities where employees’ children can receive a quality education. Those great schools, in turn, create valuable employees of the future.

Businesses can develop a broader customer base from their visibility as a good corporate citizen and schools are a good place to make that happen. Businesses often have resources that are valuable to the schools such as curriculum suggestions to create career-ready employees, internships, real-life learning experiences that

can be brought into the classroom, and financial and human resources to achieve school objectives. Employees report intrinsic satisfaction from personally being able to give back to the community when their employer creates an avenue for this level of engagement. In this give and take environment, everyone benefits. As businesses become part of the school and community, their first-hand knowledge of the needs and assets of the community can drive their own desires to make a difference in tangible ways.”

–**Nathan Monell, National PTA, 2018-19 LFA President**

From your perspective, what are some of the most critical skills K-12 schools need to be teaching students right now for success in higher education and the workforce?

“In a rapidly changing world, young people entering college, the workforce, and the military need more than a mastery of core academic subjects. Known as ‘deeper

learning,’ the broader abilities to learn, collaborate, communicate, problem-solve, and persevere through challenges are critically important to teach students the skills and knowledge that they need to compete in today’s workforce, and qualify for military service should they choose to serve.”

–**Fishman**

“With increasingly rapid changes in technology, isolated knowledge and skill sets can quickly become outdated. Students benefit, then, when schools partner to provide authentic, performance-based opportunities to develop 21st century skills and experiences, including creative problem solving, teamwork, and early access to college-level coursework, internships, and other work-based learning.”

—Ruiz

We talked about the need to start early—in elementary school, not the junior year of high school—to help more students build the skills needed to succeed in college and modern-day workforce. How are public schools responding to the changing needs of the economy? How can schools be more proactive, when we aren’t even sure what the jobs of the future will be?

“Many schools are working outside of their walls to identify key trends, inviting the business sector helps to keep the curriculum refreshed and rich. The social political climate should not dictate the curriculum BUT the curriculum should be responsive to what is happening nationally and globally.”

—Futrell

“Perhaps the single most important thing public schools need to do in this regard is to help students become aware of career opportunities. Many well-paying jobs remain unfilled, often because there is a mismatch between the skills required for those positions and the people available to fill them. This underscores the importance of businesses and public schools closely collaborating.”

—Gentzel

We discussed the need for “soft skills” at the summit. What do you see as the most important soft skills needed for success on the job? How can schools best teach these?

“Businesses need employees who can communicate well with coworkers or customers, collaborate to solve problems, and persevere to overcome challenges.”

—Fishman

“Beyond opportunities to develop technical skills and familiarity with current and emerging technologies, other 21st century skills schools should aim to provide students include creative and collaborative problem solving, and effective in-person communication skills, including through the use of relevant data.”

—Ruiz

“Educators and workforce experts alike often warn that our children need improved 21st century skills. They won’t be adequately prepared for college and

work without having these four critical areas for development: collaboration and teamwork; creativity and imagination; critical thinking; and problem solving. More than technological expertise, 21st century skills refer to content knowledge, literacies and proficiencies that prepare individuals to meet the challenges and opportunities of today’s world. Other critical skills are: a work ethic; flexibility and adaptability; global and cultural awareness; information literacy, and leadership.”

—Glenn Marshall, *Newport News Shipbuilding (retired)*; *Association for Manufacturing Excellence*

What are some of the obstacles businesses face in working with public schools?

“Schools typically lack the resources needed to update curricula to keep pace with emerging industry trends, needs, and opportunities, and to convey this information effectively to students and, more significantly, to families.”

—Ruiz

“Businesses have been critical of the work readiness of new graduates. But the schools believe they are graduating career-ready citizens. In the past, businesses have felt they should not get into the school’s business and educators thought they knew best how to graduate academically well-rounded, career-ready citizens. These groups must come together to discover how, collectively, they can understand what is needed to graduate career- and college-ready citizens. The siloed approach does not help meet the needs of the students, teachers and the employers to be successful by linking education to economic prosperity together.”

—Marshall

What are some of the obstacles educators face in working with their local businesses, community organizations, and the community at large?

“Time is a very big obstacle—people are busy and collaboration requires a deep and ongoing commitment. We need to help school leaders be more comfortable developing real partnerships with businesses, which not only would go a long way to addressing the skills gap mentioned earlier but, strategically, can help build real support for public education in a sector that, at times, has been critical of it.”

—Gentzel

“Trust is huge. Because education is a large budget item it is difficult for our members to understand what is a good opportunity for kids versus a good deal because of a sales person.”

—Futrell

APPRENTICE BECOMES CTE ADVOCATE

After high school, Pierrette Swan did what she thought she was supposed to do: Go to college and earn a degree. But graduating with no work experience during a recession did not land her a job related to her degree in art. So she applied to the Newport News Shipbuilding's Apprentice School and ultimately became a master welder.

Swan now works with NNS's Career Pathways program, which works with schools, students, and the community to help students see a wider range of career options.

Through Career Pathways, NNS employees volunteer to participate in career-technical education events held across Virginia's Hampton Roads and Richmond metropolitan areas, such as science fair judging, tutoring, mock interviewing, career talks, STEM expos, job shadowing and hands-on technology demonstrations. Career Pathways supports programs in the schools such as the Girls with Engineering Minds in Shipbuilding program, which pairs female NNS STEM professionals with middle school girls, providing mentorship and hands-on experiences.

The program also works with educators by inviting school administrators to a Manufacturing Day event each year, as well as hiring 24 Teacher Interns every summer to come work at NNS for two weeks and learn about how the many careers available to apprentices pertain to what they teach in the classroom.

Swan says that though her work in schools, she sees a need for more awareness about a wider range of careers and the technical skills needed for those jobs. She noted, "I am in schools every week and you hear the same things from young children: 'I want to be a veterinarian, or a teacher, or a police officer.' I want kids to know that these are great careers, but have they thought about becoming an electrician, or a welder, or a pipefitter?"

She added, "When students are exposed to these ideas at a young age, they can build off this information and make educated and relevant choices about their future career paths."

MEMBERS OF THE LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE

- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education,
- AASA, The School Superintendents Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- American School Counselor Association
- CoSN, Consortium for School Networking
- Learning Forward
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National PTA
- National School Boards Association
- National School Public Relations Association.

ABOUT THE LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE

The Learning First Alliance is a partnership of leading education organizations representing more than 10 million members dedicated to improving student learning in America's public schools. We share examples of success, encourage collaboration, and work toward the continual and long-term improvement of public education based on solid research.

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Strengthening public schools for every child